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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER KPAL UNSC LE SY IS  
SUBJECT: UNSC: UN ENVOY SAYS GREAT PROGRESS ON 1559, BUT  
ARMED MILITIAS THREATEN STABILITY

Classified By: Ambassador Susan Rice for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Terje Roed-Larsen briefed the Security Council on May 7 that significant progress had been achieved in the implementation of UNSCR 1559, particularly on the full opening of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria. Despite great strides in solidifying internal stability and improving diplomatic relations, Larsen stressed that no progress had been made on disarming and disbanding Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as required by both the 1989 Taif Agreement and UNSCR 1559. He said Hizballah's reported acquisition of increasingly sophisticated weaponry and its clandestine operations in Egypt, as uncovered by the Egyptian authorities, threaten the stability of Lebanon and the broader region. In particular, Larsen pointed out Egypt's discovery that the Hizballah cell had recruited explosive experts and had monitored tourists in the Sinai and shipping in the Suez Canal for possible attacks. Council members largely concurred with Larsen's assessment and focused much of their attention on the threat of the militias to Lebanon's stability. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Terje Roed-Larsen, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of 1559, on May 7 briefed the Security Council on the ninth semi-annual report on UNSCR 1559. Larsen welcomed the significant political progress made in Lebanon during the past six months, facilitated in particular since the May 2008 Doha Agreement. He also welcomed the Lebanese National Dialogue, which has convened "quasi-monthly" meetings to develop strategies to enhance the authority of the state and in which participants have committed to conduct peaceful parliamentary elections, void of violence and explosive political rhetoric. Larsen noted that general improvements in the country combined with reconciliation efforts in the region have created a favorable environment to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty, political independence and government control throughout the country. Moreover, the Damascus summit in August 2008 between Presidents Bashar Al Assad and Michel Sleiman continue to bear results, which will culminate in the exchange of ambassadors between Lebanon and Syria.

¶3. (SBU) Larsen stressed that the most alarming threat to Lebanon's stability is that of armed militias. Larsen said Hizballah's leadership has continued to assert its acquisition of more sophisticated military technology, and the porous border with Syria leads to further breaches of the arms embargo. According to Larsen, Hizballah maintains a significant para-military capacity separate from the state, which violates UNSCR 1559 and constitutes a direct challenge to the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and a threat to regional security. The government of Egypt, for instance, recently informed the Secretary-General that in 2008 a militant cell led by a Lebanese member of Hizballah was found to be operating in Egypt. Although Hizballah is the most significant armed militia inside Lebanon, Larsen said other Palestinian militias operate in the country inside and outside of the refugee camps, which can provide safe haven

for militants.

¶4. (SBU) Regarding Israeli actions, Larsen said that during the past six months, Israel continued to occupy northern Ghajar in violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and Security Council resolutions. In addition, he cited the large number of Israeli overflights, which he said the UN has repeatedly deplored and called upon Israel to cease. Larsen noted that "over the past few weeks" the Lebanese authorities had arrested individuals on suspicion of spying for Israel. According to Larsen, on May 4, Prime Minister Siniora described it as a serious violation of Lebanon's sovereignty.

Active and Armed Militias Greatest Threat to Lebanon

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¶5. (C) All fifteen Security Council members welcomed the Secretary-General's report and reiterated Larsen's points in their statements during the consultations that followed the Special Envoy's briefing. Only Libya made no mention of the destabilizing effect of armed militias in Lebanon, stating that disarmament is an internal matter for the Lebanese government. Instead, Libya focused its statement on Israel's overflights, occupation of northern Ghajar, and alleged espionage network in Lebanon and argued that before discussing disarming militias, Israel's actions should be addressed. Japan, Burkina Faso, Croatia and Costa Rica said that the presence of armed militias in Lebanon represented the most significant destabilizing factor facing the Lebanese government, and Japan explicitly called on Iran and Syria to stop supporting armed militias. Austria said Hizballah cannot be part of the government it is trying to undermine

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and called for an immediate halt to arms-smuggling. France said the government of Lebanon is the only legitimate armed force in the country. Ambassador Rice highlighted Hizballah's own admission that it supported militants in Egypt and exhorted the Egyptian military to defy its political leaders, which, she said, are actions that threaten Lebanon and the region at large. Costa Rica said the poor living conditions in the Palestinian refugee camps create vicious cycles of violence and armed recruitment, and the socioeconomic conditions of the camps must be addressed along side disarmament.

¶6. (C) Most delegations welcomed the period of calm in Lebanon and the political progress made after the Doha agreement and the diplomatic opening between Lebanon and Syria. Mexico urged all Lebanese parties to continue to abide by their commitments in Doha, and China said it was "pleased" the commitments in Doha had been either fully implemented or were in the process of being implemented. Russia was optimistic that the political process was durable, and urged Lebanon's political parties to avoid explosive rhetoric in the run-up to parliamentary elections in June. Most Council members expressed "concern" or "disappointment" with Israel's violations of Lebanese airspace and its occupation of northern Ghajar and Shebaa Farms.

¶7. (C) Larsen then spoke again, responding to questions from Council members concerning Ghajar and Hizballah's activities in Egypt. Larsen said the issue of Ghajar is complicated but can be resolved. He said all of Ghajar's inhabitants are Syrians who carry Israeli passports, want to continue to carry Israeli passports, and do not want to live in Lebanon. "Without being crass," he said, "they want to be occupied." Larsen added that he therefore has the difficult job of explaining to them that occupation is not the ideal situation. Larsen also said he wanted to remind Council members that the Council itself had accepted that Sheba'a Farms (which was mentioned by a few speakers) is not part of Lebanon, and so should not be discussed in the context of Israeli occupation of parts of Lebanon. Regarding Hizballah, Larsen highlighted key points from Egypt's report to the Secretary-General on this matter. According to the report,

Larsen said Hizballah's clandestine cell in Egypt recruited a network to operate in Egypt and coordinate confidentially with Hizballah's leadership. Egyptian security also reported that the cell had recruited explosive experts and had stocks of suicide belts, timers, explosive materials and wiring for suicide operations. Moreover, Egypt reported that Hizballah operatives in Egypt had monitored tourists in the Sinai and had studied shipping in the Suez Canal for possible attacks.

Rice